

East Hants

A Truly Unique Experience



D R A F T

**Municipality of East Hants
Tourism Strategy
August 2009**

**Prepared by
Economic & Business Development**

*With the support and input of the Department of Recreation and Culture
and the tourism stakeholders in East Hants*

**Draft
Municipality of East Hants
Tourism Strategy
August 2009**

Table of Contents

- ***Introduction***
- ***Guiding Values and Principles***
- ***Goals and Objectives***
- ***Vision***
- ***Mission***
- ***Role of the Municipality***
- ***The Strategy***
- ***Outcomes***

**Draft
Municipality of East Hants
Tourism Strategy
August 2009**

INTRODUCTION

East Hants has been blessed with many natural tourism assets. The history and rich cultures of our founding peoples is a source of interest and attraction for residents and visitors alike. Many artists have chosen to live and work here. Their art creates excitement and adds to the richness of our culture. The inventiveness and enterprise of our forefathers has left a legacy for current and future generations. We have some very unique world class attractions that are available nowhere else in the world. All of this creates a draw for visitors and tourists.

Tourism has tremendous potential to stimulate economic development in East Hants. This is especially true in our rural communities which, like similar areas across the country, are facing challenges which threaten their very survival. Tourism often is the last remaining business opportunity which can hold our rural communities together and help insure sustainability. It is for this reason that we should explore ways to encourage and support a healthy tourism sector.

It could be fair to say to date tourism has been under exploited across the municipality. There have been some notable successes based on the dedication and hard work of many community volunteers over many years. These, for the most part, have been stand alone stars in a sky of opportunity. We have not done a good job linking all our attractions and presenting a comprehensive tourism product to the world. We have not created an East Hants "brand". Other challenges to growth in tourism involve our basic infrastructure, including roads, signage, accommodation facilities and a hospitality focused culture.

In February, 2009 a group of individuals representing tourism operators, artists, community organizations and government departments met to discuss the challenges and the opportunities for the future. The energy was real and creative ideas were presented to help form the nucleus of a plan for tourism in East Hants.

A common feeling expressed by those providing input was that they love and appreciate what we have now. They want to share it with others, but do not want to lose our natural beauty and healthy rural environment and lifestyle in the process.

Municipal staff, assisted by a Tourism Advisory Committee, have taken the input received from all sources and produced a draft tourism strategy. This is seen as a "living" document which will grow and evolve with time and experience.

The approval of a tourism development strategy is the first step to laying the ground work for future growth and development of tourism in East Hants with the objective to maximize the potential and create an environment where the tourism sector and tourism businesses can thrive and help generate benefits for all communities and citizens.

**Draft
Municipality of East Hants
Tourism Strategy
August 2009**

The Vision*

East Hants is a world class destination that creates a rewarding experience through its natural beauty, culture and heritage by blending its past, present and future in a growing sustainable environment.

**(twenty five years from now)*

Guiding Values and Principles

- *To celebrate our natural and man made assets*
- *To proceed with an appreciation and respect for the environment*
- *To nourish, protect and promote the tourism product and sector*
- *To encourage experience based tourism*
- *To be market driven*
- *To provide leadership and excellence*
- *To encourage cooperation and collaboration*
- *To recognize the importance of basic infrastructure*

Our unique and special assets should be a foundation of our Tourism Strategy.

The municipality's role is to provide leadership and help create an environment so business and community groups can build the sector through their individual and collective activities.

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Municipality of East Hants
Tourism Strategy
August 2009

The Mission

To create and sustain an environment which provides a rewarding experience for visitors and citizens of East Hants and celebrates our natural and man-made attractions and assets.

- *To work with individuals, business, organizations and communities to help create, sustain, promote and celebrate our natural and man-made tourism assets and attractions.*
- *To help provide an environment where existing and new tourism businesses and organizations can thrive and grow.*
- *To advocate for a healthy and productive tourism sector.*
- *To provide a supportive environment which works to enhance and protect our man-made and natural attractions and assets.*
- *To provide a positive and supportive regulatory environment to encourage and nurture the tourism experience for visitors and citizens.*
- *To initiate and support collaboration and cooperation to encourage economic activity related to the tourism sector.*
- *To brand East Hants as a unique tourism destination.*
- *To focus on sustainable development.*
- *To build festivals and events with proven spin-off impact.*
- *To highlight our truly unique assets such as the tides and tidal bore rafting.*
- *To lower barriers to business, start up and operations.*

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Municipality of East Hants
Tourism Strategy
August 2009

The Municipality's Role in Tourism Development

- *To provide leadership by supporting and encouraging the development of a healthy and productive tourism sector for the benefit of all citizens of East Hants.*
- *To create, nourish, protect and promote "the East Hants Brand".*
- *To cultivate among the tourism partners a role of stewardship for our natural and man-made tourism assets.*
- *To work with business, organizations, communities and individuals to help celebrate and promote our natural and man-made community assets and attractions in their many forms.*
- *To provide a regulatory environment which helps protect our natural and man-made assets and encourages a healthy and productive tourism sector.*
- *To provide essential infrastructure where necessary, possible and feasible which is not available from other sources.*
- *To advocate to other levels of government for basic and improved infrastructure to help support a vibrant tourism sector.*

**Draft
Municipality of East Hants
Tourism Strategy
August 2009**

The Strategy

The Municipal Tourism Strategy is meant to provide a framework and support to create an environment for tourism to grow and prosper. The municipality will provide leadership and facilitation but it will be the creative expertise and entrepreneurial drive of the private sector that will motivate and ultimately achieve success in the sector. Volunteers and entrepreneurs are the lifeblood of the sector. The municipality will help package individual efforts and profile a complete tourism product to our audience; the world.

Pillars

The tourism development strategy contains four main activity areas or pillars.

These are:

- 1. Leadership and Facilitation**
- 2. Brand Development**
- 3. Premier Attractions**
- 4. Marketing and Promotion**

Leadership and Facilitation

A role of the municipality is to provide leadership and to work with the diverse industry partners to coordinate a productive environment and a framework to encourage development and growth. This will involve several initiatives:

1. Annual Tourism Symposiums

These sessions hosted by MEH will provide an opportunity for all stakeholders in the tourism sector to provide feedback and input for the tourism strategy.

2. Tourism Council

The Tourism Council will be an advisory group consisting of industry and government representatives to help identify strategic direction for municipal tourism initiatives on an annual basis in connection with the annual tourism symposium. This body will also spearhead with the municipality the lobby / advocacy effort directed at other levels of government for support and infrastructure (roads and signage).

3. Product Presentation and Continuity

This initiative is designed to insure quality, consistency and continuity for the East Hants tourism product (i.e. attractions, services, accommodation and amenities). It will include the development of a comprehensive "attractions" map featuring and linking all the tourism attractions in East Hants. This initiative will be coordinated with brand development and internal and external marketing efforts. This initiative will also focus on hospitality training and development for all involved in tourism businesses or attractions and service business which will interface with the traveling public in East Hants.

5. Sector Cooperation and Collaboration

This initiative will encourage cooperation and collaboration among the various players in the tourism sector in East Hants with the objective of attracting a broader

Draft
Municipality of East Hants
Tourism Strategy
August 2009

audience with a more comprehensive tourism product. This will include working with the Regional Tourism Industry Associations (CNTA), the Hants RDA, and the Bay of Fundy Partnership.

Cooperation and networking within the tourism industry in East Hants is an opportunity to better market the tourism product to the regional and global tourism market. This means that communities that might normally compete against each other should partner to better market their tourism products to increase the number of visitors from outside the region. Management and marketing of tourism often requires a community effort because of the nature of tourism; the community and its image must be marketed as a whole not just one attraction.

Effective tourism collaboration can result in service standards that will raise the quality and competitiveness of the East Hants tourism brand. Tourism collaboration or networks can allow for standardized business management and facilitate improved small business performance.

6. Visitor Information Centres

The Municipality will provide leadership to establish and support, with community groups and the private sector, three key Visitor Information Centres for the Municipality. One located at South Maitland, one at Exit 8 on Highway 102, Elmsdale and one at Exit 3 on Highway 101, Mount Uniacke. These will be operated by community or private sector groups with assistance in the form of funding and resources from the municipality. The municipality will not be the sole funder for the VIC's, but will provide funds to complement funding from other sources including other levels of government, community groups and the private sector. The centres will be expected to maintain a high standard of service and provide services and attractions beyond the distribution of tourism information. Through collaborative efforts such attractions as a railroad history exhibit or a gold mining exhibit should be considered to help build the overall tourism product. Proposals for two such possible attractions are attached as Exhibit 1 and Exhibit 2.

**Draft
Municipality of East Hants
Tourism Strategy
August 2009**

Pillar 2

Brand Development

A key element of the Tourism Strategy is the development of a unique “*Brand*” for tourism in East Hants. This will help position East Hants in a competitive tourism market and give all players in the tourism sector a common focus, regardless of their special tourism product.

It is important to understand exactly what brand means in this context. Branding is not merely a matter of creating elements of a brand. It is not just taking the logo and putting it here and there. Branding is not an advertising campaign; branding is making an impression. To be a successful brand, this impression should be consistent, truthful, and a means to differentiate yourself from competitors. Consumers have physical, emotional, and physiological needs to be fulfilled; branding allows customers to build relationships with people, products, or places that satisfy these needs.

To sum up, branding is the creation and constant development of a particular image/personality/identity for a company, department, group, person, product or place.

It is proposed that an initiative led by the municipality, with input from all tourism stakeholders in East Hants, commence without delay to develop the *Brand* for tourism in East Hants.

Pillar 3

Premier Attractions

East Hants has a number of key or premier natural and man-made tourism attractions. The strategy is to use these attractions, especially the more unique ones, to create niche and broader market draws for our tourism product. These *Premier Attractions (activities or experiences and natural and man-made attractions)* will form the basis of our tourism product for branding, marketing and promotion. The current premier tourism “attractions” can generally be grouped as follows:

1. Tidal Bore Rafting
2. The Bay of Fundy Experience
3. Festivals & Special Events
4. Heritage & Culture Attractions

**Draft
Municipality of East Hants
Tourism Strategy
August 2009**

Premier Attractions (cont)

1. Tidal Bore Rafting

Tidal Bore Rafting is a completely unique, world class, adventure experience available only in East Hants. This attraction alone has the potential to focus world attention on East Hants and provide a window to promote our many other tourism products to the world. Under this strategy all opportunities to profile and promote this activity will be explored and exploited. Because of its unique status and appeal, this activity will be one of the key components of the tourism package in East Hants.

2. The Bay of Fundy Experience

The Bay of Fundy provides East Hants with another unique world attraction including the world's highest recorded tides. This, coupled with the current initiative by the provincial government to make the Bay of Fundy a "star generator attraction", opens significant opportunity for East Hants to profile this unique attraction in our municipality. This strategy includes a commitment to alignment with and promotion of the Bay of Fundy including a Fundy Shore Drive. Because of its unique status and appeal, the Bay of Fundy and Fundy tides will be key components of the total tourism package in East Hants.

3. Festivals & Special Events

Festivals and special events are proven strategic economic engines to: a) attract visitors to a region; b) stimulate retail and services sales in hosting communities; c) provide employment; and d) generate publicity. The municipality has many opportunities for festivals and special events surrounding its heritage and cultural assets. Coordination of promotion and publicity for festivals and events is a key strategic activity as part of the strategy. The strategy will also facilitate training event organizers and marketing for events. Elements of festival and events promotion will be coordinated through the municipality as part of overall tourism product promotion.

The objective will be to create an environment where festivals and special events are encouraged and promoted in MEH.

4. Heritage & Cultural Attractions

Our history and the rich cultures of our founding peoples provide many attractions of interest for residents and visitors alike. Our links to the age of sail, lumbering, gold mining, the railway, and our First Nation, Acadian and British heritage and the international interest in genealogy are examples of attractions and potential projects with significant tourism appeal. Farms and equestrian centres also represent potential opportunities.

Integration of our art and cultural assets with the total tourism product will be a priority for the strategy. Many artists have chosen to live and work here. Their art creates excitement and adds to the richness of our culture.

The strategy will focus on coordinating the presentation and marketing of these and other projects and attractions.

**Draft
Municipality of East Hants
Tourism Strategy
August 2009**

Pillar 4

Marketing and Promotion

Getting the “message” out about the unique tourism attractions in East Hants is critical to development of the sector. In this case, being the world’s best kept secret is not a good strategy. The collaborative efforts of tourism sector businesses, organizations, volunteers and the municipality will have to be coordinated with the objective to maximize impact in the target tourism attraction markets. The Hants RDA and CNTA are seen as important partners as this strategy is developed and rolled out. The East Hants Tourism Brand will significantly facilitate a coordinated and focused marketing and promotion of the region. Municipal staff, with industry partners, will provide leadership and coordination for the development of the Marketing and Promotion Strategy. It is proposed a committee of industry and government participants be formed to focus specifically on the development of this strategy.

A proactive internet marketing strategy complemented by a vibrant, information rich website to promote the East Hants “brand” and linked to attraction sites will be a critical element contributing to success of the Municipal Tourism Strategy.

It is proposed a subcommittee led by municipal staff and assisted by tourism sector representatives be established to develop the internet marketing and tourism website strategy. One objective would be to more effectively use the municipal website to promote tourism in the region.

Tourism Strategy Implementation

The combined and coordinated resources of the municipality, organizations, the volunteer sector and the private sector will be required to effectively implement the tourism strategy. The municipality, through the departments of Economic & Business Development and Recreation and Culture, will provide leadership and coordination. The manpower, motivation and resources to build the sector will come primarily from volunteers and the private sector stakeholders with encouragement and support from municipal staff.

All municipal activities and/or programs impacting the tourism sector will be reviewed and incorporated into the tourism strategy and supporting tourism policy. The volunteer and private sector will provide input and direction for the municipal tourism sector through the annual symposiums and the Tourism Council.

This strategy is projected to be implemented over the next five years. The critical path for implementation will be identified and confirmed at the first annual tourism symposium scheduled for February 2010.

Draft
Municipality of East Hants
Tourism Strategy
August 2009

Outcomes

The strategy objective is to produce a vibrant, healthy, growing coordinated tourism sector in the municipality. Specific assets or tools the strategy will produce to facilitate this objective include:

1. A Municipal Tourism Policy with focused support and coordinated action.
2. A Brand for Tourism in East Hants.
3. A Tourism Council.
4. Annual Tourism Symposiums.
5. Departmental resources to coordinate, focus and support the tourism strategy.
6. Three Key Visitor Information Centres in the Municipality.
7. A review of the Tourism Grant Program.
8. A Festival Development Strategy.
9. A Cultural and Heritage Development Strategy.
10. Effective coordination and participation with tourism focused organizations and agencies pursuing or promoting similar tourism objectives and attractions.

Draft
Municipality of East Hants
Tourism Strategy
August 2009

The Next Steps

To get the ball rolling and stimulate implementation of the elements of the Tourism Strategy, a number of things have to happen. These include:

- Municipal Council approval of the Tourism Strategy.
- Designation of MEH departmental responsibilities for implementation of the Tourism Strategy.
- Establishing terms of reference and appointments to the Tourism Council.
- Planning for the 1st Annual Tourism Symposium to be hosted by the Department of Economic & Business Development and Recreation & Culture.

Draft
Municipality of East Hants
Tourism Strategy
August 2009

Appendices

Exhibits

Exhibit 1: 2009 Tourism Symposium & Stakeholder Input
www.easthants.ca follow the link Tourism Symposium

Exhibit 2: Gold Mining Heritage Proposal
www.easthants.ca follow the link Tourism Symposium

Exhibit 3: Railway Heritage Proposal
www.easthants.ca follow the link Tourism Symposium

Related Reference Documents (not attached)

Hants RDA Tourism Study
MEH Strategic Plan
MEH Economic Development Plan
MEH Sustainability Plan